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ABSTRACT

The impact of changing fee schedules at Florida State University on average student loads is examined. The two types of schedules used in the study are the pre-credit-hour fee schedule and block fee schedule (set amount for full-time students regardless of number of hours). The major variables considered in the study are student level and credit hour load. A change in fee schedule (from block fee to credit hour fee) effects an irreversible change in student course loads. Examination of average student loads by level of student indicates that the average load decreases under the credit hour fee schedule. Tracking of the same students from one year to the next, however, produces a less drastic change. Thus students who entered the university under the block fee system tend to carry higher loads throughout their university career than do those who entered under the credit hour fee system. With the possibility of returning to a modified block system at hand, a survey of student preference was taken. In general, students indicated that personal preference rather than cost dictated the number of hours they carried. An overwhelming majority were satisfied with their progress toward completion of their degrees. Of the students expressing a preference for a fee schedule, only 52 percent preferred the block type versus 48 percent who preferred the current credit hour schedule. (Author/LBH)

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The Impact of Fee Schedule on Student Credit Hour Load

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of changing fee schedules on average student loads. The two types of schedules used in the study are the per credit hour fee schedule and block fee schedule (set amount for full-time students regardless of number of hours). The major variables considered in the study are student level and credit hour load.

A change in fee schedule (from block fee to credit hour fee) effects an irreversible change in student course loads. Examination of average student loads by level of student indicates that the average load decreases under the credit hour fee schedule. Tracking of the same students from one year to the next, however, produces a less drastic change. Thus, students who entered the University under the block fee system tend to carry higher loads throughout their University career than do those who entered under the credit hour fee system.

With the possibility of returning to a modified block system at hand, a survey of student preference was taken to determine (a) which of the proposed systems was preferred and (b) what impact, if any, the fee structure had on the number of hours carried. In general, students indicated that personal preference rather than cost dictated the number of hours they carried. An overwhelming majority were satisfied with their progress toward completion of their degrees. Of the students expressing a preference for a fee schedule, only 52% preferred the block type vs. 48% who preferred the current credit hour schedule.

The Impact of Fee Schedule on Student Credit Hour Load

Public institutions of higher learning were established to extend educational opportunity to a wider spectrum of society by financing education through charging low-tuition fees to students and assessing residential tax payers for the remainder of the costs. The investment in progress and upwards mobility was thought to be worthy of the cost.

Carbone (1973) deplored the fact that "These Principles - so long accepted and unquestioned in America - have been, in recent years, tarnished and bent." Although Mr. Carbone was primarily concerned with the potential loss of student mobility across state lines as a result of increasing out-of-state tuition and establishment of quotas, his concern about the future of the low-tuition system (at least for Florida) was not unfounded.

In 1973 the State University System of Florida took action to change its traditional approach to the assessment of student fees. This first change was not due to considerations of State education finance policy; rather it was due to lack of fit of the current fee schedule to the growing numbers of part-time students and the need for an increase in Student Activity and Service funds at the newer institutions.

Until 1974 the fee schedule in existence was one which has been termed a block fee schedule. That is, students enrolled for nine hours or more paid a specific amount regardless of the hours carried. For undergraduates this fee was $190.00, and for graduate students the fee was $240.00. Included in this fee were such charges as Matriculation, Student Financial Aid Fee, Capital Improvement Trust Fund Fee and $32.50 for the Activity and Service Fee to support student activities, programs, and services. Students enrolled for less than nine hours paid fees on a per hour basis, with undergraduates paying $16.00 per credit hour and graduate students paying $20.00 per credit hour. No part of part-time student fees, however, went toward the Activity and Service Fee Fund. Full time out of-state students (undergraduate and graduate) paid an additional $350.00.

In March of 1974 the Board of Regents adopted a proposal which was designed to continue the guideline that tuition fees would not put education beyond the ability of the "average citizen".

In addition the new proposal was such that it would not create advantages for students carrying heavier credit hour loads nor penalize students taking a low number of hours. Further it was to be easily understood, minimize collection and administration costs, and insure that the student pay a portion of the cost of his education.

The adopted fee schedule, implemented in the Fall of 1974, established a per credit hour charge of $13.00 for undergraduate and $16.50 for graduate students. From most students' point of view the effect was either an improvement or, at worst, the status quo. Table 1 shows, for selected hours, the comparison of cost to the student under the block charge and the per credit hour charge adopted for Fall 1974.

Insert Table 1 about here

Incoming students, having received most of their material citing the then-existing block charge, by-and-large signed up for the usual course load of 15 credit hours and continuing students likewise did not make significant course load changes. Consequently, for the purposes of some of the data presented in the study, the Fall 1974 quarter is grouped with the 1973 block charge year.

In summary, the new fee schedule adopted in 1974 provided "equity" in the sense that the cost per credit hour was constant, and the schedule for full time students was in line with the previous block fee. Although it was anticipated that there would be some

decrease in the number of courses taken by the students (especially at the residential institutions, particularly at the graduate level) the impact was not viewed with disfavor. Equity concerns for the part time student, in essence, overwhelmed other concerns. Further, Activity and Service fee was assessed by the credit hour, thereby improving funds available for student-related activities.

Perhaps it was the desire for improvements in the Operating Budgets necessary to retain quality the System had begun to build, or perhaps it was the perception that substantial increases in General Revenue appropriations appeared unlikely which created a climate for further change in the fee schedule.

The reports of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (1973) and the Committee for Economic Development (1973) were receiving National attention. Florida Legislative Staffs, Government officials and the Board of Regents also considered these carefully. The recommendations contained therein provided the rationale for another revision in the fee schedule. In a presentation to the Council of Presidents on February 17, 1975, the Board of Regents staff referred to the Carnegie and CED reports. In addition an Efficiency Committee, appointed by the Governor, had made the suggestion:

"The Legislature should establish public policy regarding the percentage of the cost of post-secondary education that should be borne by the students through the payment of tuition."

Fee policy parameters were proposed which recommended that at the Lower Level, the fee would support the difference in total costs and the level of State funding equal to Community Colleges. At the Upper Level and Graduate Level, the fee would support 30% of total Cost; however, fee increases per year would not exceed 20-30%. In the case of Out-of-State students, the fee would eventually be equal to 100% of cost; again fee increases per year would not exceed 20-30%.

In accordance with the figures supplied by the Board of Regents' staff, the fee policy was revised from a fee by student level to one by course level. Table 2 shows the fee schedules for 1974, 1975, and 1976.

Insert Table 2 about here

The guidelines continued in the adoption of the 1974 tuition fee policy were thus superceeded by these policy parameters of 1975.

By adopting the proposed fee schedule in the Fall of 1975, Florida became one of six states (Colorado, Florida, Kansas, New Hampshire, Oregon and Washington) to relate tuition to a share of educational cost. Moreover, it became one of two states (Florida and New York) to have that philosophy incorporated in explicit Legislative language. (Van Alstyne, 1977).

Table 3 compares (across the years) the cost of the most prevalent load of credit hours (15) taken in 1973.

Insert Table 3 about here

This rate of increase in the fee and, indeed, the improved awareness of the opportunity to control tuition fee outlay by courses taken had the anticipated effect. Whereas the change in credit hour loads from 1973 to 1974 had been minimal, continuously increasing costs per credit hour assured greater changes. Table 4 shows changes in headcount and changes in total credit hours taken.

Insert Table 4 about here

While the University was adjusting to the fact that an increase in headcount students would not necessarily generate an increase in resources, discontent with the fee schedule grew. The perennial increase in tuition became a major source of concern to the students. The policy parameters implemented in 1975 came under attack as the expectation of a further increase (especially at the graduate level) loomed ahead for 1977. At the same time, nationally, there were disagreements with the conclusions contained in the Carnegie and CED reports. (Johnson and Leslie, 1976; Chambers, 1977).

There were two reactionary moves which served to hold tuition constant for 1977-78 and 1978-79 in Florida. The first of these involved the Legislature. Previous statutory authority for setting the fees resided with the Board of Regents with the requirement of Legislature reaction only in case of disagreement. In other words, if the legislature did not specifically veto fees proposed by the Board, the fees were effected. The Legislation was changed so that any new fee schedule proposed by the Board must be approved by the Legislature. The second reaction was by the Board of Regents' staff. In proposing a fee schedule for 1977, the staff suggested a return to a modified block charge. The proposal specified a per credit hour charge to a certain level of credit hours (12 or 13), a block charge for a span of credit hours (12 - 18 or 13 - 17), and a return to the per credit hour charge beyond the upper limit determined. This block charge proposal was not accepted by the Board in 1977 nor in 1978. This action should not be interpreted as a denial of the block charge concept. Rather the Board requested further study and information before taking action on the matter.

It was the above proposal which initiated a study at Florida State University to:

1. Determine which fee structure students preferred.

2. Assess the impact of fee structure on credit hour load.

The study at Florida State University was conducted in two parts:

1. A comparison was made of credit hour load distribution by level of student each Fall quarter - Fall 1973 through Fall 1977.

2. A questionnaire was distributed to survey student opinion of the various tuition structures.

Distribution of Credit Hour Load

Method

To examine the changing pattern of credit hour load distribution, data were collected for each level of student (Freshmen, Sophomore, Junior, etc.) on the number of hours carried per quarter--Fall Quarter 1973 through Fall Quarter 1977. All students registered for three or more hours were considered in the study. Using these data, frequency tables were constructed which reported the number of students registered for a specified credit hour load (3, 4, 5, 6, etc.--up to 22). The tables included:

1. The distribution of credit hour load by level of student by quarter.

2. The distribution of credit hour load by level of student for those quarters under the "block" charge (Fall 1973 and Fall 1974) compared with the quarters under the per credit hour charge (Fall 1975, Fall 1976, and Fall 1977).

3. The distribution of credit hour load by level of student for a class entering under the block charge (Freshmen 1973, Sophomores 1974, Juniors 1975, Seniors 1976) compared with a class entering under the per credit hour charge (Freshmen 1975, Sophomores 1976, Juniors 1977).

Graphs were drawn depicting these distributions. Chi-square tests were performed to determine the impact of type of fee structure on the number of hours carried by the student. Tests were also performed to determine the impact, in addition to that of fee structure, of student level and full-time/part-time status. The alpha level for all tests was set at .001.

Results

When the Chi-square tests were performed by level of student (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, or Graduate), in each case it was found that credit hour load and fee system were not independent. The calculated Chi-square values were used as measures of association. It was noted that for undergraduate students, hour load and fee structure were more highly associated the lower the level of student. The contingency coefficients computed from these tests, though significant per the results of the Chi-square tests, were low. This supports a finding from the questionnaire that tuition costs were not the primary factor in determining the number of hours a student carried.

The frequency tables were then arranged to look at students carrying normal loads (12-18 hours). Again it was found that at each student level, credit hour load and fee system were related. When the tests were performed on part-time students (3 to 11 hours), we failed to reject the hypothesis of independency of credit hour load and fee system in the case of undergraduate students. For graduate students, however, the tests showed that credit hour load and fee structure were not independent.

The graph of students entering under the block charge showed that these students continued to carry larger loads even after implementation of the per credit hour charge. Figure 1 graphs the distribution of credit hour load for a class entering under the block charge schedule. Figure 2 graphs the distribution of credit hour load for a class entering under the per credit hour schedule.

Insert Figure 1 and Figure 2 about here

Student Opinion Questionnaire

Method

To assess student preference for a particular charge system--approximately 5,000 questionnaires were distributed during early registration, Spring Quarter 1977. Students were asked to indicate their preference for one of the three fee structures described below:

1. Per Credit Hour Charge: The student pays a specific charge per credit hour determined by the level of the course.

2. Block Charge - 12 through 18 hours: A student enrolling for 12 through 18 hours inclusive would pay at the rate of 15 hours based on student classification.

3. Block Charge - 13 through 17 hours: A student enrolling for 13 through 17 hours inclusive would pay at the rate of 15 hours based on student classification.

In addition, students were asked to give the reason(s) which most influenced their credit hour load. The questionnaire also provided for the collection of personal characteristics (classification, sex, age, and race) to compare respondents to the total student body to ascertain a representative sample.

Results

An analysis of the questionnaire responses indicated that 48% of the respondents preferred a per credit hour system and 51% preferred a block charge system. When these results were detailed by level of student, we found that over 50% of the freshmen, sophomores, and graduate students responding preferred the per credit hour structure. Less than 50% of the juniors and seniors preferred the per credit plan.

Students were asked to specify (or rank if applicable) which of the five reasons listed below most influenced the number of hours they were carrying during the Spring 1977 Quarter. The choices included:

1. Per credit hour charges make larger load financially unfeasible. This reason was reported as most influential in 12.4% of the cases.

2. Current employment makes heavier academic load impractical. This reason was reported as most influential in 11.4% of the cases.

3. Extra-Curricular activities (other than employment) make heavier academic load impractical. This reason was reported as most influential in 10.6% of the cases.

4. Current quarter load is sufficient for desired progress toward completion of degree. This response was given most frequently--in 58.0% of the responses.

5. Other--usually reported when the student was an undergraduate registering for an internship (usually 15 hours) or a graduate student registering for a minimum full-time load (12 hours).

Discussion

At Florida State University it was found that with the implementation of a per credit hour fee structure the distribution of credit hour load did change. This effect increased as the fees increased. Fewer students carry "heavy" loads. More students opt for the minimum "normal" load of 12 hours. Figures 3 through 6 present the frequency distribution of credit hour load for each level of undergraduate student. The solid line represents data for Fall 1973 (block charge system). The broken line represents data for Fall 1977 (per credit hour charge). The change is especially dramatic for students who entered the university under the per credit hour charge. (See Figures 3, 4, and 5.)

Insert Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 about here

The study indicated that those students entering under the block fee continued to carry heavier loads. (See Figure 1.) For undergraduate students entering under the per credit hour system, the hour load did increase for a number of students as they neared the end of their Bachelor's Program. Thus the impact of a new fee schedule on credit hour load seems to be most prevalent for students entering the system; those already enrolled do not appear as likely to change their behavior. Just as there was a gradual decrease in credit hour load with the implementation of the per credit hour charge, an immediate increase in loads should not be assumed if a return to some sort of block charge were implemented. Based on the results of this study, it appears likely that the majority of students currently enrolled at Florida State University would not take advantage of the block fee.

The type of charge appears to have no impact on part-time students. Students who fall in the "Part-time" category are likely to do so regardless of the fee schedule in use. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Florida State University has a strict policy regarding underloads.

In a State where operating budgets are determined, for the most part, by total credit hours taken, the departure from the block fee schedule (and accompanying deceleration in the rate of credit hour increase) has resulted in a slow-down in the rate of growth of

resource appropriations. In implementing a tuition policy which related tuition to a share of the educational cost, it seems that the effects on the institutions were underestimated. Perhaps a return to the block fee, if accompanied by an increase in the credit hour load, will over time resolve the difficulties created over the past few years. A complete assessment of the effect of the per credit hour fee and appropriate counter balancing actions may have created a more stable environment.

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Table 1

Cost To Student Under Block Charge

As Compared With Fall 1974 Per Credit Hour Charge

Undergraduate Students			Graduate Students		
Credit Hours	1973 Cost	1974 Cost	Credit Hours	1973 Cost	1974 Cost
1	16.00	13.00	1	20.00	16.50
9	190.00	117.00	9	240.00	148.50
12	190.00	156.00	12	240.00	198.00
15	190.00	195.00	15	240.00	247.50
18	190.00	234.00	18	240.00	297.00

Table 2

Comparison Of Fee Schedules 1974 - 1976

	1974-75	1975-76	1976-77*
Undergraduate	13.00		
Lower Level		14.00	15.00
Upper Level		15.00	16.50
Graduate	16.50		
Classroom		20.00	22.00
Thesis/Dissertation Hours		22.00	24.00
Out-of-State			
Lower Level	24.00	23.00	23.00
Upper Level	24.00	32.00	35.00
Graduate Level	24.00	37.00	40.00

* In order to stimulate summer enrollment, in-state fees for Lower and Upper Level credit hours were reduced, with 1977 summer session, to $9.00 and $10.50, respectively.

Table 3

Cost of 15 Credit Hours 1973 - 1976

	1973	1974	1975	1976
Lower Level - In State	190	195	210	225
- Out-Of-State	540	555	555	570
Upper Level - In State	190	195	225	247.50
- Out-Of-State	540	555	705	772.50
Graduate Level* In State	240	247.50	300	330

*For the purpose of calculation, only graduate classroom charges have been made.

Table 4

Comparison of Headcount and Credit Hours 1976 Vs. 1973

	1973	1976
Headcount		
Lower Level Students	5,994	5,917
Upper Level Students	9,243	9,942
Graduate Level Students	3,571	4,101
Credit Hours		
Lower Level Students	97,908	89,960
Upper Level Students	124,284	130,662
Graduate Level Students	51,592	44,603

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Distribution of credit hour load for a class entering under the block charge schedule.

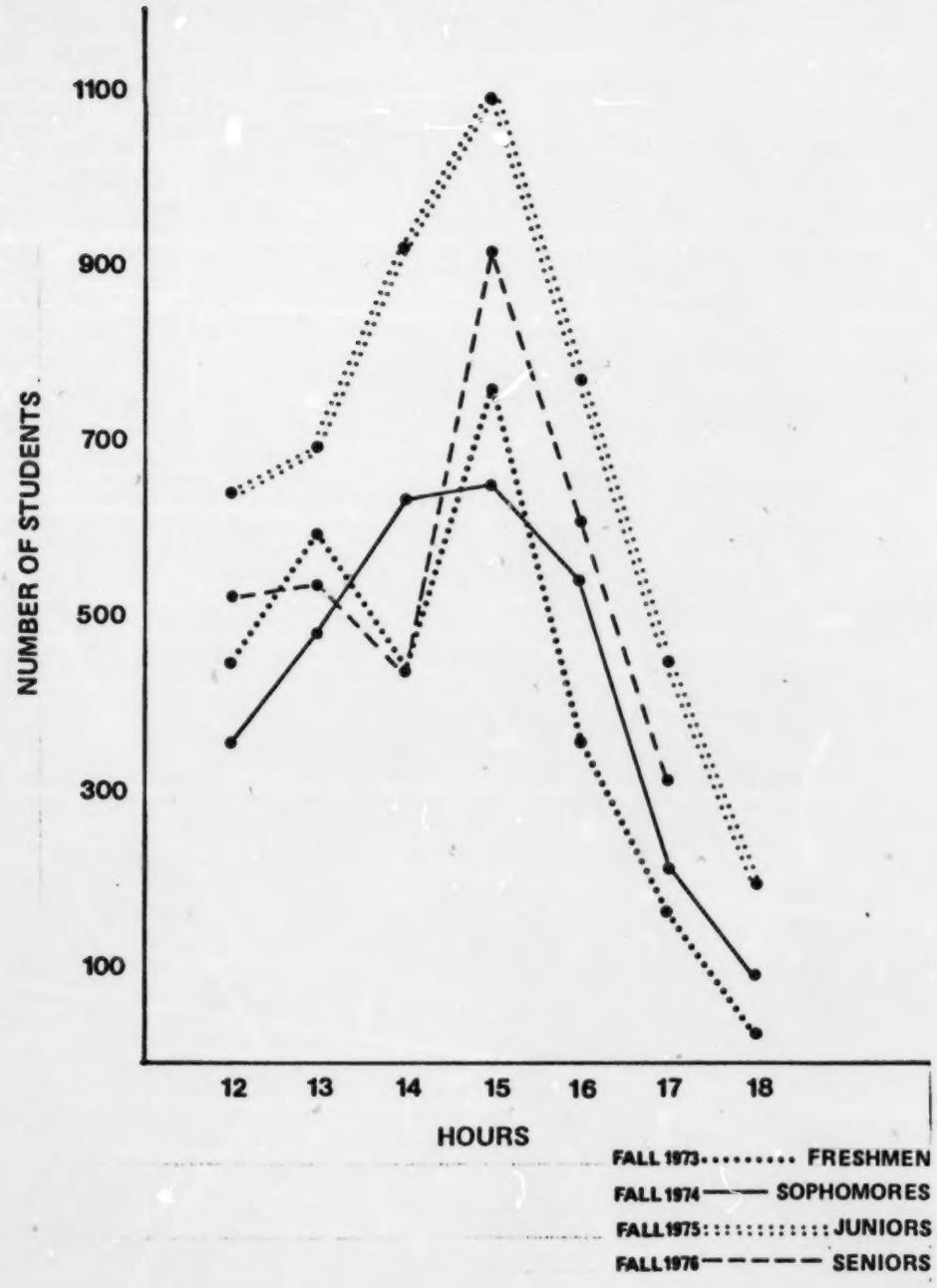
Figure 2. Distribution of credit hour load for a class entering under the per credit hour schedule.

Figure 3. Distribution of credit hour load for Freshmen 1973 and Freshmen 1977.

Figure 4. Distribution of credit hour load for Sophomores 1973 and Sophomores 1977.

Figure 5. Distribution of credit hour load for Juniors 1973 and Juniors 1977.

Figure 6. Distribution of credit hour load for Seniors 1973 and Seniors 1977.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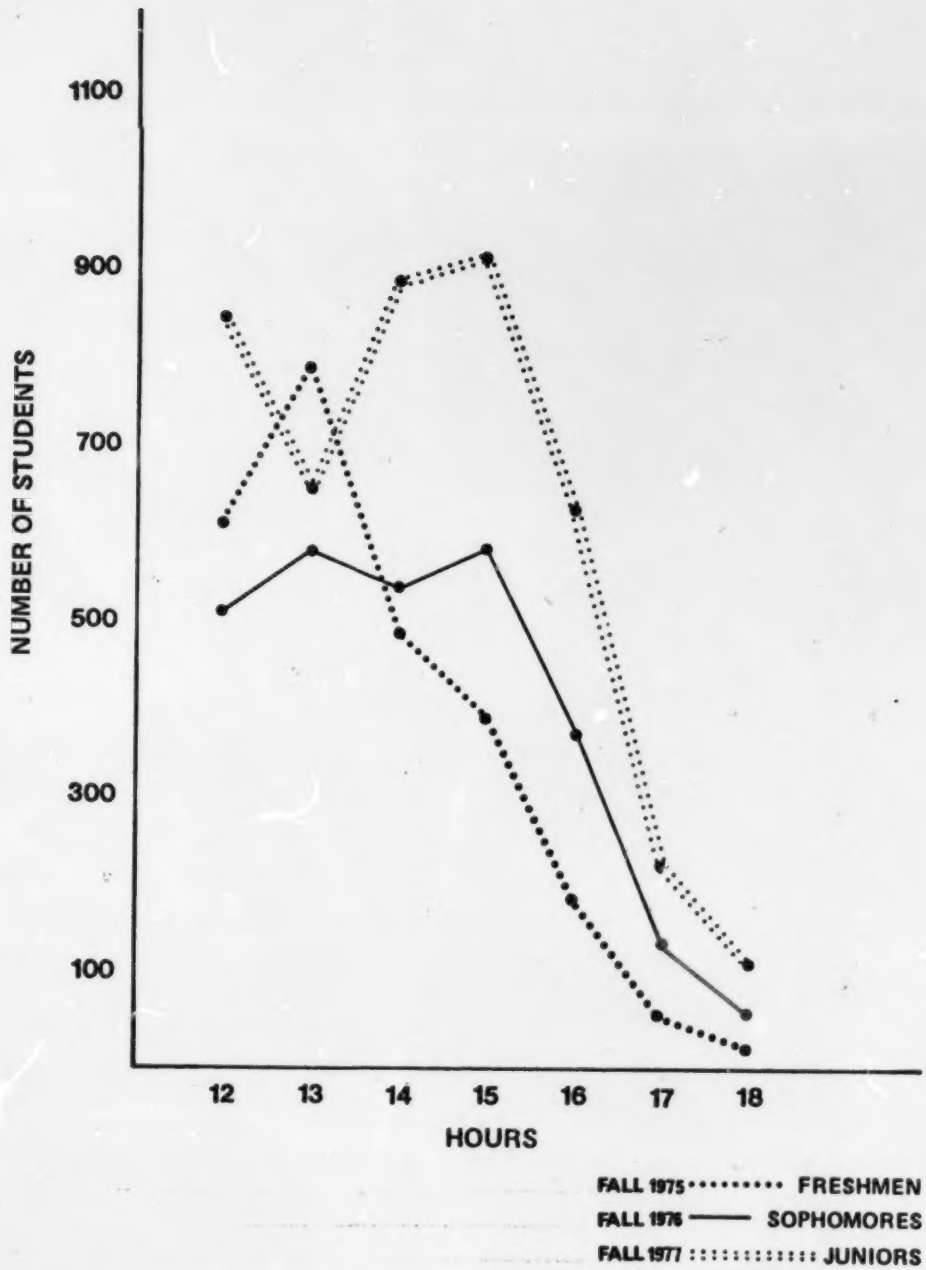
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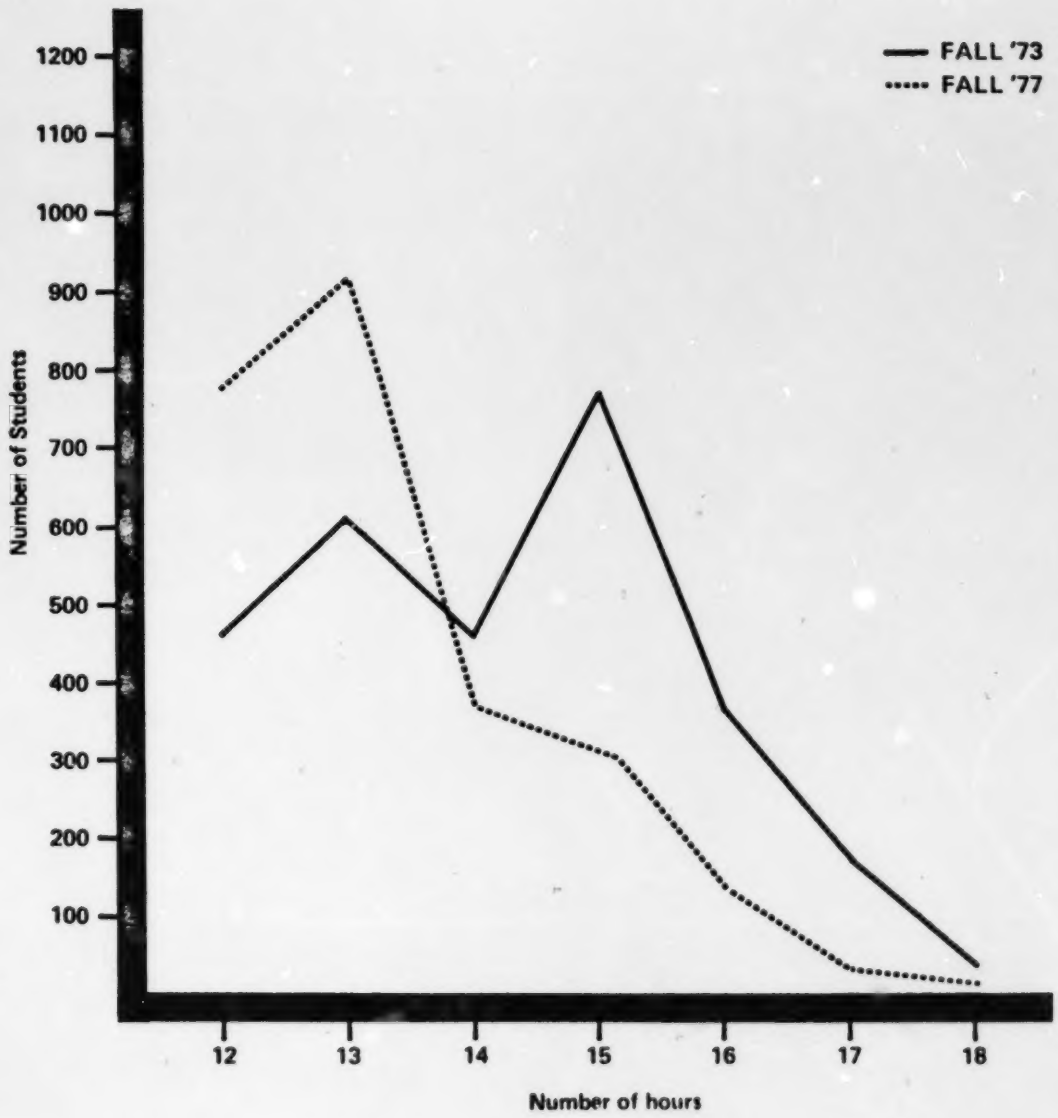
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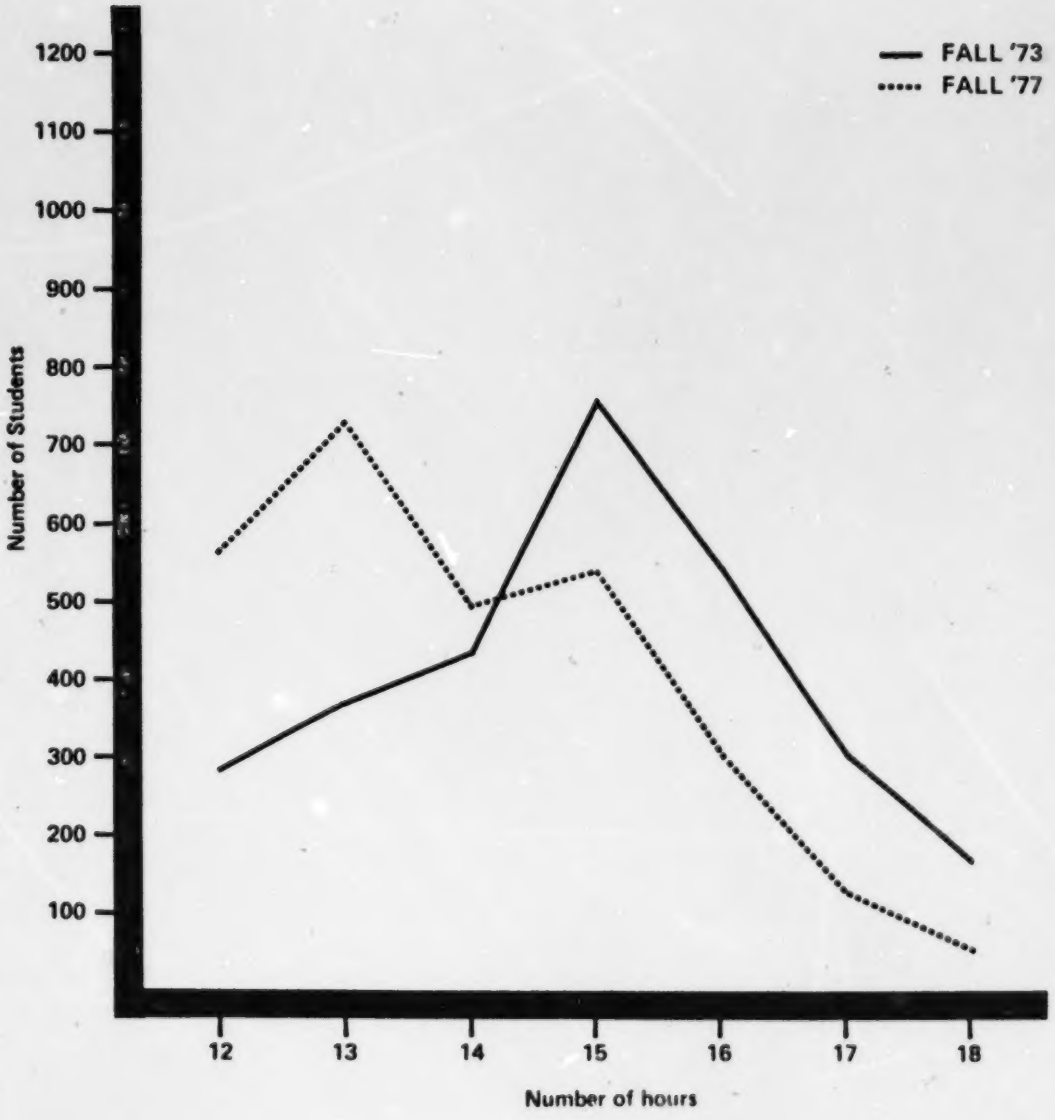
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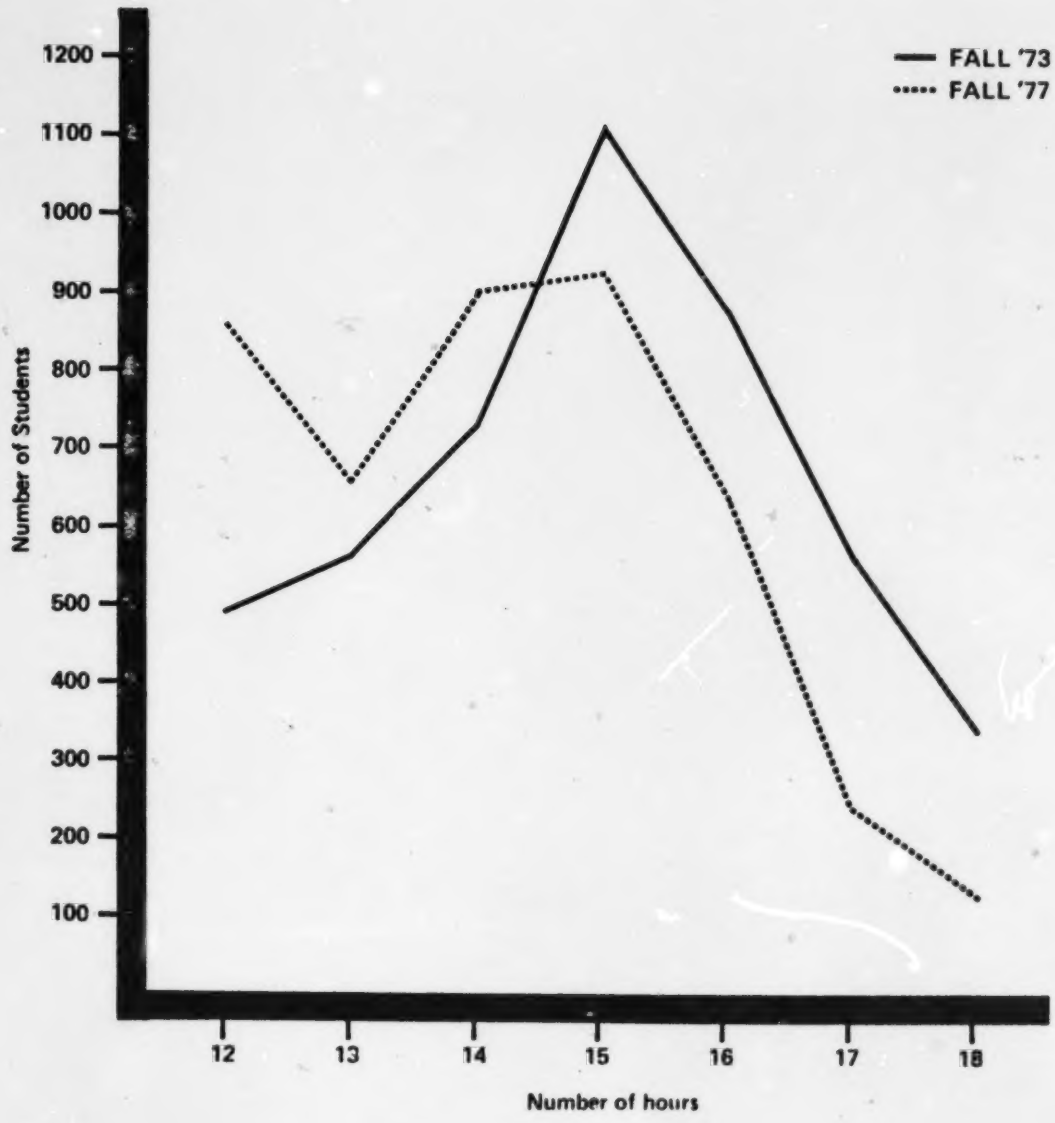
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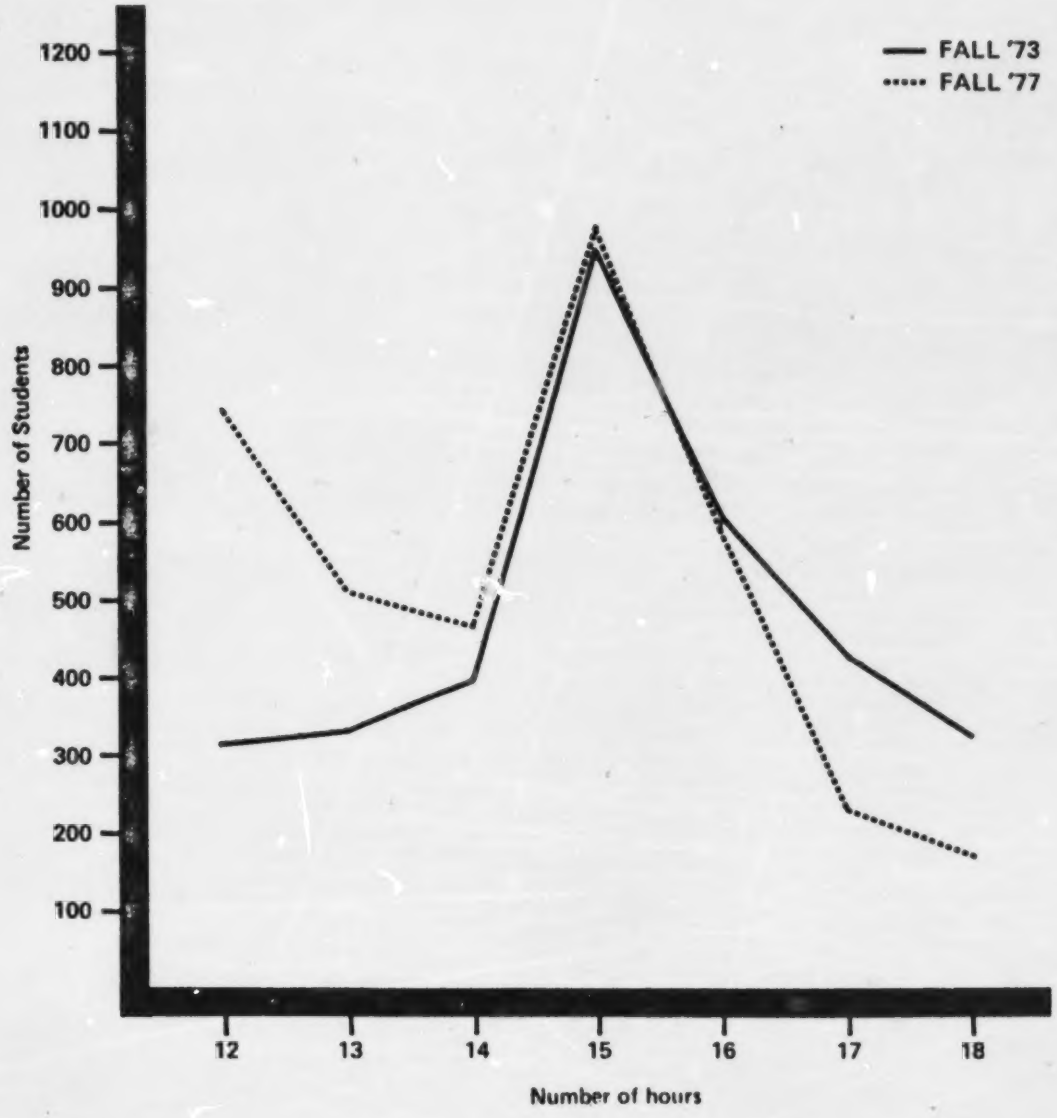
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